



News Release

For Immediate Release
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You Can Prevent Cervical Cancer *UDOH Promotes Benefits of Low-cost HPV Vaccine*

SALT LAKE CITY – In a single year, it is estimated that more than 11,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer. Of those, nearly 3,670 will die. The good news is that most cervical cancer deaths can be prevented.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is observing National Cervical Cancer Awareness month this January by calling on all eligible women and girls to be vaccinated against cervical cancer.

More than 99 percent of all cervical cancers are caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. with approximately 50-80% of sexually active adults having been exposed to HPV. “Most of the time, HPV causes no symptoms or health problems and will simply go away by itself” said Karen Zempolich, MD. “But for some, a persistent HPV infection as a young woman can lead to cervical cancer, requiring surgery or radiation.” said Zempolich.

In addition to cervical cancer, HPV causes precancerous changes of the cervix that affect more than 500,000 women in the U.S. annually. While precancerous changes are often treated effectively with minimally invasive procedures, repeated treatments can threaten a woman's fertility and childbearing options.

A vaccine for HPV was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in June 2006 and is effective against four strains of the virus that cause 90% of genital warts and 70% of cervical cancers.

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“Making the vaccine available to the public is another step forward in preventing cervical cancer altogether,” said Kalynn Filion of the UDOH Cancer Program. “We hope that women will consider their health and take this small step in preventing this potentially deadly disease.”

Vaccination is another layer of protection against cervical cancer, but is not a substitute for routine screening with Pap tests. That’s because the vaccine does not protect against all HPV types that cause cervical cancer.

The vaccine is licensed for use among females 9-26 and may be given at the same time as other vaccines. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) routinely recommends the HPV vaccine for girls 11 and 12 years of age, which is given in a series of three injections over a six-month period. The vaccine is also recommended for girls and women 13 through 26 years of age who did not receive it when they were younger.

The UDOH is able to fund the low-cost vaccines for women ages 19-26 through a \$1 million donation from Utah industrialist Jon Huntsman, Sr. Additionally, qualifying adolescents and teens may receive the vaccine through the CDC’s Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program.

There is a small fee charged to administer the vaccine. For a list of locations where the vaccine is available and other cervical cancer screen services, call 1-800-717-1811 or for more information visit www.utahcancer.org/prevent.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.